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ABSTRACT

A study of effective English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teaching in large classes is presented. The small body of literature on class size and student achievement is reviewed, the "large section" approach is described. The approach is evaluated with data on student performance in an ESL program offered at Montgomery College, (Maryland). Two conclusions are drawn from the existing literature: (1) teacher workload is a sum of total students and teacher duty hours per week; and (2) student achievement results from teacher practice, not class size alone. Based on these findings, the teacher redistributed his required workload by combining three sections of a lecture-oriented intermediate grammar and composition course into a class of 75 students. The faculty time now not spent in class was reallocated to office hours for tutorials and group conferences. Student achievement in this "megasection" was compared to achievement of a like number of students in conventional sections of the same course, and the two groups were tracked during the following year for measures of progress, retention, and success in the required ESL sequence. For the most part, no significant difference in performance was found beyond slight group variations, supporting the megasection approach. (MSE)

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Larger Is Sometimes Better
Approaches to Larger Classes

A Juried Paper

Presented at
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Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
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10 March 1988

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Montgomery College

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Larger is Sometimes Better
Approaches to Larger Classes

John K. Bolton
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1. Introduction and Statement of the Problem

This paper proposes a pedagogical heresy: larger ESL classes are sometimes better. "Larger" means 75 students or more. "Better" means teachers have more quality time to give to students if they teach one section of 75 students instead of three or more sections of 25-30 students each. Moreover, "better" means better results. For the most part, the students in the large sections described in this paper progress and achieve as well as their conventionally taught counterparts -- sometimes better. In defending the heresy, the paper reviews what little literature there is on class size and student achievement, describes the large section approach, and evaluates the larger-is-sometimes-better hypothesis with data on student performance over a year.

Setting and Background

Montgomery College

Montgomery College is a comprehensive public community college in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D. C. Current enrollment on three campuses is about 15,000. At the Rockville Campus, where I teach, enrollment is about 11,000 students enrolled in 56 curricula consisting of 800 courses, more than half transfer-oriented. In any semester, approximately 1100 students are non-native speakers of English, called "international students" on our campus. About half of the international student population is in the Program in English as a Second Language. ESL is in the English Department.

The Area Montgomery College Serves

The immediate area served by Montgomery College is Montgomery County, just outside Washington, D. C. with a 1986 metropolitan area population of 3.6 million (Pressley, 1987). The major industry of the area is the Federal Government. Constellations of government contractors, service firms, and research and development companies orbit the metropolitan area. Understandably, the second largest industry in the area is printing and publishing. Several major corporate headquarters are in the area.

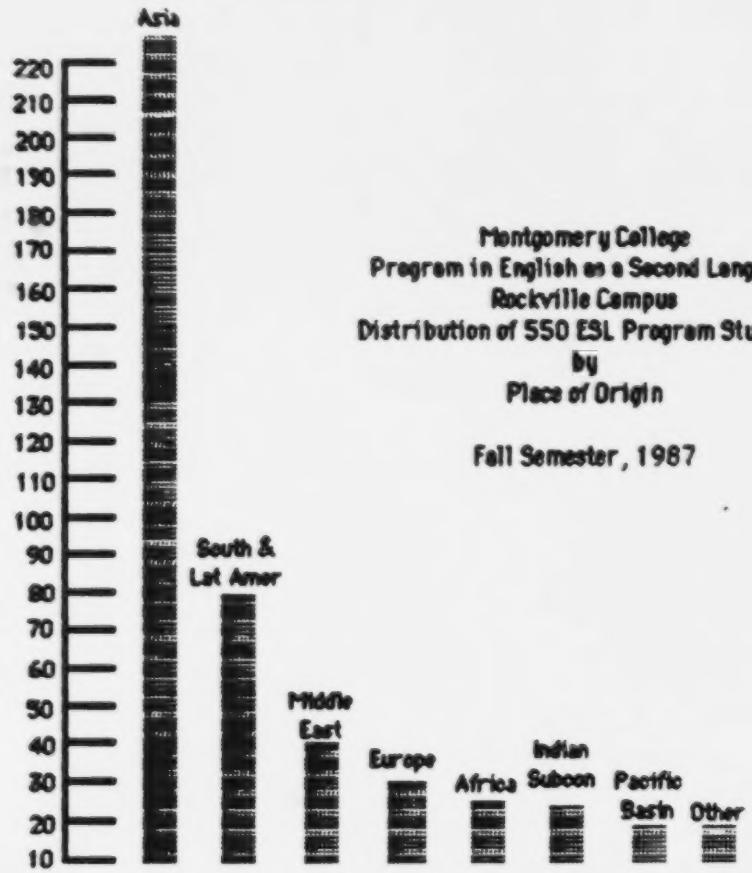
The Washington metro area is a major population center for 450,000 foreign-born people, 12.5% of the population (Pressley, 1987). By the year 2020, 1 million Asians and Hispanics alone will populate the area. Washington is the third largest Central American, the fourth largest Korean, and the largest Ethiopian population center outside the respective native countries. By 1990, an additional 600,000 legal immigrants (and half again as many illegal immigrants) will have settled in the Washington area (Pressley, 1987).

internationals in the Washington metropolitan area are committed to success and education for themselves and for their children. Hispanics and Asians own about 5,000 small businesses in the area. Approximately 90,000 internationals are in school during the 1987-1988 year. Of these about 50,000 are in ESL courses somewhere -- in schools, colleges, and proprietary institutions. Twelve public schools in the Washington area have foreign-born enrollments of 50% or more. A broad cross section of the international community in the Washington area attends Montgomery College. ESL programs are found in each of the other major area universities and colleges in the (Pressley, 1987).

International Students at Montgomery College

Figure 1 depicts the current student population in Montgomery College's ESL program by place of origin.

FIGURE 1



Paralleling somewhat the population of the Metropolitan area, Asians are Montgomery College's largest international student population group, followed by Hispanics, Middle Easterners, and Europeans. Most students have a native language which is not Indo-European. A third have studied a second language (which is not necessarily English)before coming to the U. S. More have learned a second language without having

studied it formally. Most students are permanent residents.

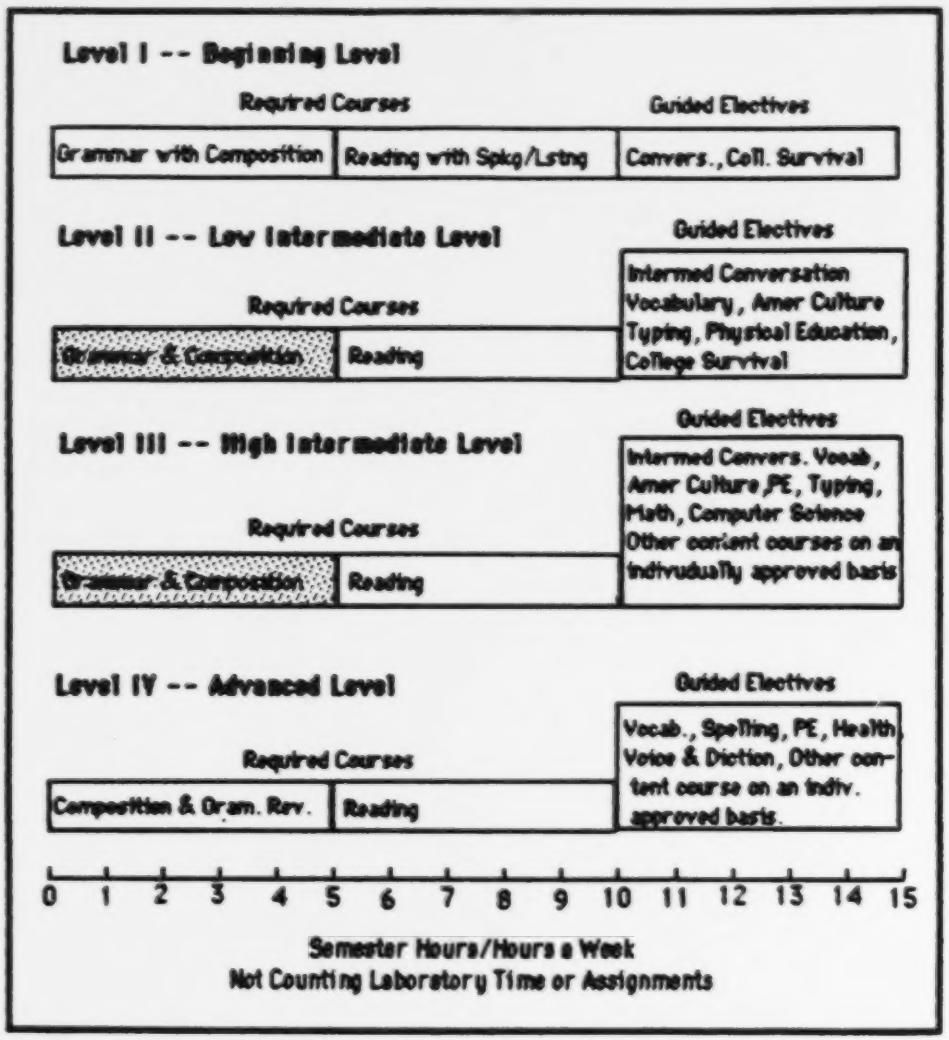
Montgomery College's ESL Program

Figure 2 illustrates the organization of Montgomery College's ESL Program.

FIGURE 2

Montgomery College
Program in English as a Second Language
Courses by Level

Students are placed in each level by entrance exam or by satisfactory completion of exit standards for previous level.


Level I -- Beginning Level
Required Courses
Guided Electives
Grammar with Composition
Reading with Spkg/Lstng
Convers., Coll. Survival
Level II -- Low Intermediate Level
Guided Electives
Intermed Conversation Vocabulary, Amer Culture Typing, Physical Education, College Survival
Required Courses
Reading
Level III -- High Intermediate Level
Guided Electives
Intermed Convers. Vocab, Amer Culture, PE, Typing, Math, Computer Science Other content courses on an individually approved basis
Required Courses
Reading
Level IV -- Advanced Level
Guided Electives
Vocab., Spelling, PE, Health, Voice & Diction, Other content course on an indiv. approved basis.
Required Courses
Composition & Gram. Rev.
Reading
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
Semester Hours/Hours a Week
Not Counting Laboratory Time or Assignments

Montgomery College's ESL program is semi-intensive. The program operates within the College's course-and-semester system. Students register for ESL courses in five semester hour increments. Courses often combine acquisition skills. Composition and grammar,for example, are combined in differing proportions depending on level, with heavy composition and light grammar at the advanced level. Mandatory placement in four ability levels is based on the CELT test, a writing sample, and an interview. Testing may be waived if the student demonstrates proficiency via TOEFL scores, or acceptable course work transferred from another college or university.

English as a Second Language II, the "EL 099" the course covered by this paper, is an intermediate level course in grammar and composition. Students in this course typically take parallel reading and speech courses, and on an as-approved basis, may take one course for credit (often math , PE, computer science, college survival).

Statement of the Problem:

Class sizes in ESL classes at Montgomery College are officially capped at 22 students. In practice, however, this often means 25 or more. ESL class sizes of 25 are typically found in community colleges, as Lanier's survey of working conditions and job satisfaction of ESL teachers in higher education shows (1985). Reducing class sizes to provide opportunities for better instruction and less harried, more satisfied teachers is impossible -- devoutly to be wished, but probably never to be seen. College administrations cannot or will not change what is perceived to be cost-effective, or at least cost-adequate. One wonders how effective he/she is in classes that have grown to lecture capacity but require individual student work if the syllabus is to be followed.

The catechetical approach breaks down under the weight of numbers. Teacher-student interactions are infrequent. Recitations and dialogues are more demonstrations for class observation than they are participatory for individual students. Large numbers of students result in fewer hours and minutes devoted to each student in class and with written work -- to say nothing of preparation time. The conscientious teacher wonders about diminished effectiveness. The system takes its toll of fatigue, disillusionment, and burnout. Unless one's dissatisfaction leads one to quit the system, there has to be a more advantageous and desirable *modus operandi* within the system.

A hypothesis emerges: one can "repackage" the combination of required class sizes over several sections and duty hours a week to more manageable proportions without compromising students' performance. Larger may be better. One large class may serve the students and their teacher at least as well as several smaller ones -- perhaps better. Putting it a slightly different way, if there is one large class three times a week,I can use the time generated by this aggregated section to students' advantage. Both students and teacher may be better off.

2. Review of the Literature on Class Size

The literature that deals with the effect of class size on student performance is meagre. Although there are surveys on class size such as the Lanier study of working conditions (1985), and institutional studies including Carey (1986) who compares local institutional class size that of to other colleges, studies on class sizes and student performance in ESL are hard to come by. Neither ERIC nor other computerized bibliographic searches revealed studies explicitly relating ESL class size and student achievement.

One does find studies discussing class size and student performance in English composition and developmental studies at the college and high school levels. Because ESL and developmental studies in English share concerns about class size and the extent to which class size impinges on interactive teaching procedures, these findings are relevant for ESL professionals interested in the impact of class size on student performance over time.

The findings are not gratifying for small class advocates. There is, after all, an orthodox tradition to the proposition that small classes are necessary for student achievement. A student learns the language through interaction -- between him/herself and other learners, between him/herself and teachers. For dialogue to be more than audience workout, for TPR (total physical response method) to be either T or P, for conferencing to be more intense than passive group therapy, the teacher-student ratio has to be kept small,the theory holds. Small classes are required for the styles of teaching which the extensive collective wisdom of the profession knows is necessary in English language instruction.

However, the literature on class size in developmental English and composition challenges the received wisdom many of us see as orthodoxy.

Holly Smith (1971) prepared a review of the literature and an annotated bibliography for NCTE's Standing Committee on Research. NCTE's research was directed to finding an optimum class size favorable to student achievement, yet responsive to economic and other constraints of administration. Smith's conclusion is indicative of research findings generally: "For the most part, the findings show that large classes versus small classes have *little or no effect* in student performance" (p. 4).

One institution cited by Smith is that of Indian River Junior College. Hopper and Keller (1966) found that despite variations in student preferences (mostly for smaller classes), compared scores on pre-and post-tests showed that a class size of up to 56 is not a significant variable in learning writing skills in developmental and freshman English.

Major universities are not exempt from the "little c. no effect" generalization which Smith uses to characterize the literature. The Pennsylvania University found that 42 "major colleges" in its survey planned to continue large sections as giving "very satisfactory to adequate results" in student performance (p. 6). One may speculate, however, that the Penn conclusion has limited relevance for ESL classes, in that as Lanier (1985) finds, ESL class sizes in baccalaureate colleges and in universities is typically under 15. Further, as Staczek and Carkin (1985) found, the intensive ESL program is typically placed outside

the academic mainstream in universities. For this reason, ESL is probably not within the Penn's generalization.

Less generally, in a very detailed study of developmental English sections at Bakersfield College [California], Silver (1970) found there was no significant difference in post-test (Iowa Test of Educational Development) achievement scores between large classes and small class control groups in developmental English. In fact, the larger class experimental group scored slightly better. Silver went on to discover that that there was no significant difference between the groups in grade point average or in rates of completion in the next higher course. Silver's findings are similar to the findings in my study.

Picking up the cause of small class advocates, Betty Bamberg (1977), in reporting the findings of a California Association of Teachers of English committee [chaired by Joanne McKenzie of California State University] survey of 115 school districts, sees a definite relationship between class size, workload, and effective composition instruction. Bamberg memorializes a complaint frequently aired but addressed with surprising rarity in the profession: "Large class size was most often cited [among 204 teachers surveyed] as a detriment to composition instruction" (p. 11). Predictably, and with due consideration of NCTE's standards of no more than 100 students a day and no more than 25 in composition classes, CATE's committee major conclusion is: reduced total student loads are necessary if composition is to receive the attention demanded of it by the public.

Who can disagree? Attention -- publicly demanded or otherwise -- requires small classes. Certainly teachers and probably students (Hopper and Keller, 1966) see small classes as necessary for effective instruction. However, whether small classes necessarily correlate with student performance is another issue which Bamberg does not address.

Bamberg's study (and the views widely held in the profession which it reinforces) may conclude hastily. The CATE committee found that average class size, by itself, is actually *not* a good predictor of workload, and thus may not be a *bete noir* militating against effective instruction. There are other, perhaps overwhelming, workload factors that may preclude effective instruction notwithstanding class size. Indeed, the CATE study goes on to cite several reasons to explain why average class size is not a good workload predictor:

- Ranges in class size (in the CATE study, from 14 to 37) are too broad;
- Special classes (e.g., remedial, developmental, ESL) have special problems not given to generalization;
- The number of class sections per teacher is as important a factor as class size, maybe more so; and
- Duty hours per week, in and out of class are not factored in class size statistics (most teachers responding to the CATE survey worked 50-60 hours a week and found that was not enough time to do a thorough job with the sections they had).

A conclusion suggested by the Bamberg/CATE study is: teacher workload is a function of the total number of students and the total number of hours a week which the teacher confronts -- not class size *per se*

In a different context, Sidney Bourke (1986) surveyed 63 teachers in Melbourne, Australia to determine their workload and its corresponding effects. Bourke found that variables *other than class size* correlate with student achievement. If anything, Bourke argues, class size, large *or* small, has a moderately negative affect on achievement. Using a low-inference observation schedule developed by Stallins (1971), Bourke found that what does affect achievement are teaching practices including student-teacher interaction, probing by the teacher, catechetical repetitions, follow-ups, and waiting for students to formulate answers to questions posed directly by the teacher. It is these factors, *not class size by itself*, that affect student performance. Relating these factors to class size, there is a positive correlation between class size and achievement *when* these practices are used. When they are not used, the correlation between class size and achievement is negative. One concludes from the Bourke study that achievement is not a function of class size, but of what the teacher's practices are -- regardless of class size.

Two conclusions from the literature seem to stand out: Bamberg/CATE find that workload is a sum of total students and duty hours a week. Bourke finds that student achievement results from teacher practice, not class size *per se*. These conclusions suggest an opportunity for the teacher who is interested in his or her own well being and the performance of his or her students. However, this teacher is in an environment where class size cannot be reduced and where duty hour expectations of administrations or union contracts are high. Perhaps one's load in students and in hours can be "repackaged" to permit performance-enhancing teaching practices within a more decent and endurable workload.

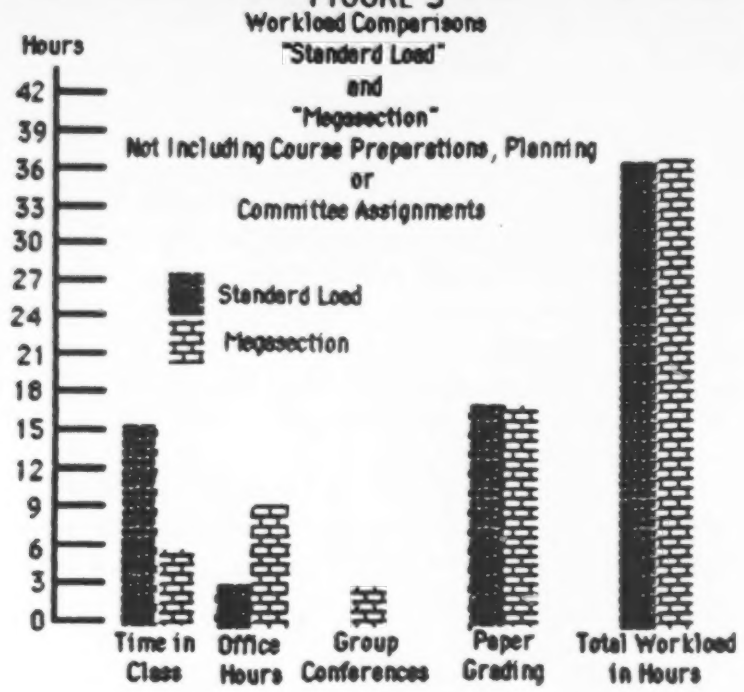
3. <u>The Problem Addressed</u> -- <u>Creation of a "Megasection"</u>

In my case,"repackaging" resulted in a "megasection" (three sections in one) of a grammar/composition course. Because of additional time which the creation of the megasection generates, I was able to arrange supplemental structured meetings and tutorials with students on a small group and individual basis.

Fortified by some assurance in the literature that student performance is a function of factors other than class size, interested in forefending burnout, and convinced that section sizes of 25 preclude a catechetical approach to teaching the language, I approached the administration with a proposition to redistribute my required workload.

I targeted one course, a five-hour intermediate grammar-composition course called "English as a Second Language II" EL 099. A class load of 25 per section requires teaching approaches away from the Socratic or catechetical approach and more of a traditional lecture approach. What the teacher does in essentially lecture-oriented classes of 25 over 15 hours a week ("Beyond group therapy," I said to a colleague) could be done at least as well for 75 students five hours a week. Figure 3 illustrates the "repackaging" of workload approved by my Department, the administration, and the faculty union.

FIGURE 3



Notes: Standard load required by contract. 15 hours, up to five sections. Up to 300 students if 3-hour courses taught. Megasection workload satisfies contract load with 3 5-hr. sections. Total of 75 students.

The tradeoffs are essentially these: Time in class, reduced by the megasection format, is allocated to additional office hours for tutorials and group conferences. Paper grading time, which is measurable (Bamberg 1977) is essentially the same, as are preparation time, committee assignments, and other duties associated with college work, which are less measurable. As planned, the approach results in no net difference in workload hours per week. In actual practice, however, the megasection encourages the teacher to spend a few extra hours. (It is very difficult to reject students who find the conference sessions to be helpful and enjoyable.)

3.1 Characteristics of the Megasection Approach

Lecture Section:

All students meet five hours a week for presentations on announced topics based on, but not repetitive of, assigned readings. Attendance is required. Despite the *Paper Chase* image of a lecture section of 75 students, the presentations are interactive. Presentations are punctuated with probes. Students may (and do) ask questions whenever they want. Students are asked questions. Dialogues take place with class critique providing choric commentary. Students recite. Homework exercises are reviewed -- sometimes with student work at the chalkboard. The content of dialogues, exercises, and tests is taken from the daily life of students. Students' names appear in these contexts.

Conference Groups

Three times a week for an hour -- two if the students need the time -- I meet with students in the College Writing Center for group conferences on topics that are announced (e.g., articles, verbals, prepositions, sentence combining, basic paragraph organization, etc.), or on issues which the students bring themselves. Conferences involve a PSI (personalized system of instruction), a "buddy system," and small group work, concerning specific problems identified by the students themselves or by the teacher. Because attendance at the conference sessions is optional, student problems tend to be self-selected, if not self-defined. Additional feedback is provided to the instructor. Students who come to the sessions tend to be well motivated; they seek solutions. Comparing gradebook entries with conference attendance records, students seem to enjoy improved performance on examinations and compositions. Some students, however, come for the socialization and opportunity for conversation practice which the Writing Center's congenial environment provides.

Required Individual Conferences

Students are required to attend individual conference sessions at about weeks 4, 8, and 12 during the semester, or when they receive a test or composition grade of C- or below (usually about 70%), or when I put a "Please see me!" sticker on a returned paper. When students appear for conference, they bring a portfolio of accumulated written work, required of all students. Progress over time is reviewed. Conferences are tutorial and catechetical.

Required Lab Work

The English Department requires a certain amount of lab work in the Writing Center and Language Lab. Instructors are free to implement this requirement as they see best, within certain prescriptions. My Writing Center requirement, the same as that of most EL 099 teachers, is 10 generative exercises written in the Writing Center under the supervision of a peer tutor or faculty tutor. These exercises involve sentence composition by formula, with accumulative levels of difficulty from the composition of primary sentence parts through word, phase, and clause modifiers, ending with compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Tutors other than the instructor critique and provide guidance. Students must secure tutor approval to advance to the next exercise. Four exercise sets are required in the language lab . Each exercise consists of a pretest dictation, CALL grammar exercises consisting of grammar recognition/completion exercises, a cloze exercise, and finally a post-test dictation.[1] Some EL 099 teachers follow this regimen; others require up to 30 hours a semester in the language lab working with tapes and workbooks (e.g., Joan Morely's Improving Aural Comprehension)

[1] Please see Diana Jones, "Writing and Adapting Computer and Audio Materials for Language Skills Integration," TESOL 1988 (Paper and Software Fair Presentations)

4. Evaluation of the Megasection Approach

4.1 How Well the Students Do

"Does it work?" How well do students who enrolled in the Megasection perform when compared to students who took the course in conventionally scheduled, conventionally taught sections? Does class size in this case make a difference in student performance?

To compare the performance of students in the Megasection to that of students in conventional students, 50 Megasection students who passed EL 099 in the Fall of 1986 were identified as an "experimental group." According to the College's counseling staff, some of these students registered for the Megasection because they wanted to study with the teacher. The "mix" of Megasection students, however, was random in that the range of CELT test scores indicating placement in EL 099 was represented as proportionately as it would have been in other conventional sections.. Fifty passing students from conventional sections of EL 099 whose Social Security numbers were selected at random became a "control group." As it turned out, one section (20 students) were a high track for the course; that is, their CELT scores were almost high enough for the next course in the ESL sequence except that one score (e.g, a reading or grammar or listening comprehension) might have suggested caution. If anything, the control group might have been expected to perform better due to the influence of these "high pilot" students.

All 100 students (i.e., 50 Megasection, 50 control group) were "tracked" from Fall, 1986, the semester of their EL 099 enrollment, through the Fall Semester of 1987, a year later. Each student's grade history was accessed from the College's data base. Tallies were kept on performance measures. The performance measures tabulated for all 100 students were: credit hours attempted and completed, quality point averages (QPA by semester and cumulative quality point averages - CQPA), and other individual data allowing one to compute rates of progress, retention, and success in the sequence of English courses required of ESL students.

Table 1 compares performance measures for the two groups:

TABLE I

100 EL 099 STUDENTS -- ONE YEAR LATER

Comparisons of Performances of Experimental Group and Control Group

Data for Experimental Group (Megasection) are printed in heavy type.
Data for Control Group (Conventional Sections) are printed in light italic type

Credit Hours

	Last Sem Attempt	Last Sem Earned	Cumulative Attempt	Cumulative Earned
Total	**289** /*314*	**263** /*266*	**550** /*732*	**494** /*654*
Avg/Student	**5.78** /*6.28*	**5.26** /*5.32*	**11.0** /*14.64*	**9.88** /*13.08*

Quality Point Average*

	Last Sem	Cumulative
Average - All Students	**2.21** /*2.44*	**2.12** /*1.24*

Progress Rate [Cumulative Hours Earned/Cumulative Hours Attempted]

89.8 /*89.3*

Retention Rate [Number Continuous Enrollments /N (50)]

66% /*62%*

Next Course in Sequence (English 100)**

	Attempts	Passed	Failed	Withdrew	Repeated
Number	**50** /*42*	**29** /*29*	**15** /*16*	**5** /*3*	**3** /*5*
%	**100%** /*84%*	**58%** /*58%*	**30%** /*32%*	**10%** /*6%*	**6%** /*10%*

English 101* Completions**

Number Completions	% Completing	Course QPA
18 /*16*	**36%** /*32%*	**2.16** /*2.33*

* Quality Point Average counts credit courses only. ESL courses are not counted.

** English 100, a high level writing course -- immediate preparation (and prerequisite) for English 101.

*** English 101 (Montgomery College's "Freshman Composition") is a 3-credit course generally considered as the first "mainstream" course in English for non-native speakers.

Discussion:

Table 1 compares measures of student performance of 50 passing students who took EL 099 in the Megasection format to those of 50 students from conventional sections of EL 099 who make up a control group.

Progress as a Function of Completed Credit Hours:

Control group students earned more cumulative credit hours over the year, with a difference of 3.2 hours average per student, or credit in one more course (assuming most courses are 3-hour courses) than his or her Megasection counterpart. However, it appears that the "staying power" of earning credits over time is not significantly different between the two groups: as the "Last Semester Earned" [Fall, 198Z, a year after EL 099] column shows, there is only a three hour difference in cumulative hours between the two groups and a difference of only .06 in the average hours earned per student. The number of cumulative hours completed divided by the number of hours attempted gives a rate of progress in completed credit hours. This rate favors the Megasection group slightly, by 0.5 %.

Conclusion: While students in conventional sections generated more credit hours overall, the rate of success in terms of recent courses taken and rate of progress is not significantly different between the two groups.

Progress as a Function of Grade Average:

In most schools, grades and success are perceived to correlate positively. Students are perceived as successful according to how high the grade average is. In their last semester (Fall 1987 - a year after EL 099), the control group had an average quality point average (QPA based on a 4-point scale with "A" as 4.0 per earned credit) which was slightly higher than earned by the Megasection group.

However, in cumulative grade averages (CQPA for the entire elapsed year), the Megasection students averaged 2.12, while the control group averaged 1.24, a difference of .88. Although the experimental group's progress rate is slightly higher than that of the control group, the Megasection students (who did not study with me in subsequent courses) appear to be significantly more successful with their grades.

Conclusion: The size of both groups may be too small for any definitive conclusions correlating either group with grade success. However, it appears that there is no significant difference between the groups' progress. Megasection students have an edge of almost one full grade in their record of grade achievement.

Progress as a Function of Retention:

Student retention rate (i.e., how long they stay in school) is often regarded as a measure of progress. If students stay in school, it is a fair inference that they can do the work and that they like their experiences. 66% of the Megasection group had been in school continuously since Fall 1986, compared to a 62% retention rate for the control group of students from conventional sections.
Conclusion: There is little difference in retention rates between the two groups.

Progress as a Function of Completing the Course Sequence in English

EL 100, an advanced level ESL writing course is the next course in sequence for ESL students who pass EL 099. It is a prerequisite for EN 101, Montgomery College's freshman composition course and is the first "mainstream" English course offered for credit. Between the groups, the same number of students passed EL 100, and almost the same number failed or withdrew or repeated EL 100. A slightly greater proportion of Megasection students completed English 101 with a slightly lower grade average than their control group counterparts.* The drop in numbers of completions between EL 100 and EN 101 (of about 30%) is probably caused by College and English Department policy: international students are permitted a full credit course load in the curriculum after EL 100. Many postpone their EN 101 requirement to the last possible semester (usually the semester of graduation or transfer).
Conclusion: Megasection students and control group students progress at about the same rates through the English course sequence.

Summary Conclusions:

For the most part, measures of performance such as completed credit hours, grade averages, (CQPA), retention, and completed English course sequence reveal no overall significant difference between the experimental Megasection and conventionally scheduled control groups. Megasection students have a slight edge in credit hours earned in the last semester (1 year after EL 099), in CQPA, retention rate, and in course sequence completions. Control group students have a slight edge in cumulative hours earned, last semester's QPA, and the course QPA in EN 101

From the data measuring student progress, it is apparent that Megasection students do just as well one year later -- in some cases better -- than their counterparts from conventionally scheduled and conventionally taught sections.

* It should be noted with pride that the English 101 course average for ESL students is higher than that of the course College-wide (1.88).

4.2 Other Impressions

From a personal point of view, the megasection approach has much to commend it. There is less wear and tear on the teacher. Even if one teaches only one course in multiple sections, conscientious class performances do demand one's physical and psychic energies. One class is less demanding. One feels that his/her "performance" counts for more when it is not repeated. Preparations are, frankly, more deliberate and careful. One has to like large group presentations: structured lecture-discussion presentations before large groups is not for everybody. One has to be a teacher-actor and have a knack for exploiting the theater of the lecture hall. The monotony of teaching multiple sections of the same course is gone with the "megasection." This is not to say, however, that there is less work. In actual clock hours per week, there is as much if not a little more than in conventional approaches. However, the work is more satisfying. The feedback of individual tutorials and small conference sessions affirms the pleasures to be had from good teaching and grateful learners.

My first preferences would involve a 9 or 12 hour load and 10 students in a class. My second preference is to do as well as I can by my students and myself in the constraints in which I have chosen to work. In my experience with the course and situation as I have described it, larger is sometimes better.

5. Remaining Questions

Several questions remain:

Does the Megasection demand too much of the student?The Megasection seems to demand much. So does intermediate level ESL instruction in any format in which it is "packaged." Some students complain about the large size of the lecture section and about the amount of work. Others enjoy the anonymity offered by the lecture section. Some say they like the "theater" of the large lecture (esthetic distance can be used to facilitate interest, involvement, and learning). It does appear that the required individual conference sessions are more "work," in that a student is required to come to see the instructor at least three times a semester. However, there is no specific "homework" or other student preparation for these tutorials; the student has done all the necessary work before the tutorial takes place. The optional conference sessions impose no additional burden which the student does not him/herself seem to enjoy assuming. About half of the students who pass the course come to these sessions.

As for actual demand on the student (in contradistinction to some students' perceptions of demands placed on them), the net amount of effort demanded of students is about the same in the megasection group as it would be in conventional sections (including mine) when the teacher intervenes assertively in his or her students' progress.

How cogent are students' opinions about large classes? Perhaps 25% on my last evaluation took exception to the large class they were in. However, other comments they

had about the course, the methods of teaching, tests, instructor availability, and fairness were about the same as responses of students who had used the same questionnaire in conventional sections of the course which I taught in preceding semesters . The rate at which students would recommend the course to a friend was not different (over 80% in both the megasection and in traditional sections I had taught previously).

On the other hand, perhaps student preferences for smaller classes are a function of the peer support group which the class may represent to some students. Associations in class may create support out of class. Except for some clique-forming which I have seen occur in the megasection or as a result of it, the larger class may not accord this sense of belonging. Whether student feeling for class-as-support group has any affect on learning is doubtful, in the light of the literature and considering the findings of this paper. A possibility, neither confirmed nor challenged by this paper, is that the small group discussion sections which the megasection approach provides may provide the same kinds of support that smaller classes provide.

Is the teacher better off teaching conventional sections, or is the megasection approach an improvement in his/her working conditions? For me, the latter. For others, much depends on the local situation, the teacher's predilection for managing large classes, his/her tolerance for the intensity of tutorial interaction, and his/her tolerance for risk.

Will administrations take advantage of megasections? Will administrations assume that if I can teach a megasection for five hours a week, I can teach three of them for fifteen? It depends on how principled or how parsimonious an administration is. One might also check out how many rooms on his/her campus hold 75 students or more. On my campus, five rooms are at that capacity (not counting performance auditoria). Megasection classes are in all of them at different times in the day. The approach is used in Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Art, Graphics, as well as in ESL).

Is the megasection approach a sell-out? To what, I would reply, is one selling out? If the alternative were the ability to teach classes with 10 students, probably it is a betrayal of some kind. If the alternative is as I have described (as many as 200 students spread over five sections and 15 hours with up to five preparations), I plead guilt -- and relief.

7. End Note

In an essay titled "Numbers and Time," the College Entrance Examination Board (1985) expressed concern for the effect of too many classes in the day and too many students in each class. "The consequence," CEEB asserts, "is that the time we have to give to important tasks is much too small" (75). CEEB underscores the consequence even more strongly in citing Theodore Sizer's *Horace's Compromise*, in which the author offers this rather trenchant description of too many classes and too many students and too many hours:

> Most jobs in the real world have a gap between what would be nice and what is possible. One adjusts. The tragedy for many ...teachers is that the gap is a chasm, not crossed by reasonable and judicious adjustments. Even after adroit accommodations and devastating compromises. . . the task is already crushing, in reality a sixty-hour week
>
> (CEEB, p.75).

CEEB goes on to advise that teachers need to come forward with possible solutions with an increasing sensitivity to teachers' needs in solving the problems of difficult workloads and the attendant inattention to the needs of students: "What we want are more ideas, more experiments, and more communication about what works and what does not" (76).

The larger is sometimes better approach is an experiment which has worked.

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